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Statement submitted by Soroptimist International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2014/1/Rev.1, annex II.



Statement

Soroptimist International speaks on behalf of over 80,000 women from 3,000 communities across 127 countries and territories. We are founded on the principles of being a global collection of women who join our movement to serve women and girls locally, nationally and internationally. Our positions are based on their voices, perspectives and opinions. We are a bottom-up organization of like-minded individuals who all want the same thing — a world where women and girls together achieve their individual and collective potential, realize aspirations and have an equal voice in creating strong, peaceful communities worldwide.

Soroptimist International has been working towards this goal since 1921 and, while we have seen extraordinary progress in some areas, many of the barriers facing women in 1921 are still prevalent now, albeit in different forms. Women and men still do not have access to the same capabilities, resources or opportunities.

Much of the discussion on the post-2015 development agenda centres on the idea of creating “the future we want”. The members of the global Soroptimist movement believe that the shared vision of a future we want means, essentially, one thing — that no matter where you are born, whether you are male or female, whatever colour your skin is or who your parents are, whatever economic or political climate surrounds you, it is your human right to be free to achieve your fullest potential, and it is the global community’s responsibility to ensure that you have the tools to do so.

No single Government, private institution or civil society organization can achieve this alone. Each player in this tripartite system brings different incentives, perspectives, priorities and, most importantly, expertise. It is only when all are working in concert that the vision for the future can be realized. It is absolutely critical that appropriate accountability mechanisms are not only in place but also enforced without exception in order to ensure that all actors are fulfilling their responsibilities.

The Millennium Development Goals were groundbreaking. While most, if not all, of the goals and targets already existed in international treaties, agreements or platforms for action, never before had the global community together agreed on a focused and achievable set of priorities with such clear targets and indicators. The Millennium Development Goals changed what we did and how we did it.

It is time to break ground again. The post-2015 development agenda must act as a catalyst to change the way we approach development. Development simply is not possible without including those affected by the decisions. No longer should we give individuals what we think they need. The time has come to turn the tables and give individuals what they say they need to achieve their fullest potential.

There are many lessons to be learned from the successes and shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals. Challenges in implementation abound and more are identified every day. Soroptimist International, based on information gathered from our clubs around the world, would like to draw attention to the following specific issues:

- Women and girls live in a historically patriarchal world, with many local and national systems and structures still biased towards men. Many women and girls face daily challenges simply to survive. Research proves that these structures render women and girls more vulnerable and resource-poor than men, and less able to cope with crises or volatilities. Conflict, natural disasters and economic crises therefore affect women and girls more adversely than men and have created insurmountable barriers to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Without addressing the underlying structures that render women more vulnerable, women will remain at higher risk, and the global community will continue to face barriers to achieving development goals.
- Policies and programmes continue to focus on the tangible fixes: increasing enrolment in primary education, improving health services, reducing poverty, increasing food security and making clean water and sanitation part of everyday life. While all of the above will have a positive impact and will improve lives, they will never effect lasting change, not without addressing the underlying causes of poorer outcomes for women.
- The global community knows that what you measure significantly impacts on what you do and how resources are distributed. The Millennium Development Goals did not treat gender as a cross-cutting theme. Indicators for each and every goal should have been disaggregated by sex.
- Funding and financing were noticeably absent. It is of particular importance that there was no mention or requirement to deploy gender-responsive budgeting and gender audits.
- Accountability mechanisms were weak. All involved actors, in particular Governments and private institutions, must be held to account for their actions or lack thereof. Naming and shaming is usually not enough. Soroptimist International recognizes that it is difficult to create accountability mechanisms in a non-legally binding agreement, but many of the goals relate directly to rights defined in legally binding treaties and conventions. Much more work needs to be done to link development goals to legally binding human rights in order to improve accountability.
- Violence against women and girls was not addressed. This is one of the primary barriers to achieving gender equality and ensuring that women have equal access to resources. It is no wonder that the Millennium Development Goals did not achieve what they could have for women and girls.
- Gender has two sides, yet the Millennium Development Goals focused solely on women and girls. To truly effect change, attention must be paid to working with men and boys and breaking gender stereotypes for women and men.

With these challenges in mind, the global Soroptimist movement makes the following specific recommendations for the post-2015 development agenda, with a view to transforming the lives of women and girls:

- Whatever goals and targets are eventually agreed, the data collected on each and every one must be disaggregated by sex.
- Men and boys must be an integral part of empowerment programmes as we work to address the underlying social and economic determinants of the vulnerabilities of women and girls.

We therefore need to:

- Approach sex- or gender-based quotas with careful planning and ensure that women are, from an early age, fully equipped with all of the knowledge and skills necessary to take on leadership roles for which there may be allocations or other similar mechanisms. A woman who is given a position because of her sex, not her qualifications, is not achieving gender equality. On the other hand, a woman who is given a job because she has had equal and meaningful access to education throughout her life, has been afforded the same opportunities as men, has achieved her fullest potential and is fully qualified for the position is achieving true gender equality.
- Consider also that by encouraging women to enter traditionally male-dominated fields, there may be an inherent and underlying message that traditionally female-dominated fields are of lesser quality and importance. Alongside encouraging women to enter traditionally male-dominated fields, we also must work to encourage men to enter traditionally female-dominated fields in order to truly overcome and change occupational segregation. The unconscious bias in job selection works both ways.
- Exercise extreme caution to avoid implying that gender equality is about women taking on male roles. Many of the gender equality targets and indicators measure women taking on male roles, thus creating a world where neither women nor men are given the fullest spectrum of choice and opportunity to shape their lives as they want. We, as the global community, must not judge or impose but rather support and enable. We must also look at creating work environments that are conducive to both men and women having families.
- Ensure that a stand-alone goal that includes a target on eliminating violence against women is measured in a progressive and reliable way. Rather than solely tracking reported incidents, which could create perverse incentives or unintended negative consequences, we should also be measuring access to appropriate services, sensitivity training for law enforcement, laws that protect women from violence and criminal justice systems that do not allow gender-based violence to continue.
- Guarantee that discussions on financing and resourcing the post-2015 development agenda take a gender-responsive approach and include gender audits. This is non-negotiable in order to ensure that goals and targets for gender equality are not just lip service.

Soroptimist International urges Member States to discuss these issues honestly and openly and to tackle the challenges head-on in order to create a truly transformative post-2015 development agenda.